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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Fifteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 391st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 2 June 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Azerbaijan (continued)

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GE.97-16878 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 6) (continued)

Initial report of Azerbaijan (CRC/C/11/Add.8, CRC/C/Q/AZER.1 (List of issues to be taken up in connection with the consideration of the initial report of Azerbaijan); (written replies by Azerbaijan to questions asked in the List of issues to be taken up) (document without symbol distributed at the meeting in English only)) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Azerbaijan resumed its place at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the delegation of Azerbaijan to reply to the questions raised by the Committee at the previous meeting.

3. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan), referring to the question of the definition of the child, said that various draft legislative texts currently under consideration envisaged a series of different ages for access to various rights. At present the minimum age for service in the armed forces was 18 years and the minimum age for seeking redress in court without being represented by one's parents was 16. The minimum age for marriage was 18 years for boys and 16 for girls, the difference being due to the country's traditions, of which the authorities had to take account.

4. With regard to the role of the boy child and the girl child in the family, he pointed out that Azerbaijan, which was a secular republic, did not apply Islamic law. That was why, under the law, boys and girls enjoyed the same rights. No special legislation had been adopted to implement the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women, but Azerbaijan was carrying out a programme of assistance to the young family which took account of most of the concerns expressed at the Beijing Conference. Disabled children received an allowance up to the age of 16 years. With regard, finally, to incorporating the Convention in domestic law, he said it should be borne in mind that Azerbaijan was a young State which had been given a new Constitution only in November 1996. Moreover, Azerbaijan had acceded to numerous international instruments that would progressively be incorporated in national legislation. To that end the Azerbaijani authorities would like to be able to take advantage of technical assistance.

5. Mr. KARAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that under the law on education all citizens without discrimination must enjoy the benefit of education for at least eight years. At the end of the eighth year, a citizen might extend his studies until the eleventh year. At the end of the eleventh year any pupil who had gained a diploma had the right to take a competitive examination and to enrol in universities and other institutions of higher education according to his results. The public universities were free, and the private institutions of higher education fee-paying.

6. For reasons to do with the country's traditions and prevailing attitudes, the age for sexual consent was not laid down in any law. The only age explicitly stipulated was that for marriage. A law dating back to the Soviet period permitting girls of 11 to marry had been repealed. It was true

that at the beginning of the 1990s child mortality had increased. The phenomenon was essentially due to the consequences of the conflict with Armenia. There had been transfers of population from the territories where the conflict was taking place, and that had caused serious epidemiological problems. Since the ceasefire the Azerbaijani authorities had managed to bring the situation under control with the assistance of the international organizations, notably UNICEF, which had helped to organize a vaccination programme. In that connection it was worth noting that the entire population of Azerbaijan was now vaccinated against poliomyelitis.

7. Azerbaijan currently embraced 80 different nationalities and ethnic groups, and several religions, including Islam, Christianity and Judaism. With regard to efforts to combat discrimination, he pointed out that the President of Azerbaijan had promulgated a special decree on the promotion and protection of the freedoms and rights of minorities and ethnic groups. Finally, although it was true that the legislation accorded equal rights to the boy child and the girl child in the family, it nevertheless had to be acknowledged that traditions died hard and that young girls, who were expected to become housewives, were more often called upon to undertake household tasks, whereas boys received an education geared more to the outside world than to the home.

8. Mrs. EVAZOVA (Azerbaijan) said that her country had ratified the Geneva Conventions in 1993, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1995 and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1996.

9. Mrs. KARP pointed out that the written replies provided by the delegation of Azerbaijan indicated that children aged from 15 to 18 could defend their rights before the courts. That appeared to conflict with the information given orally by the delegation. She asked whether the authorities intended specifically to establish in the new legislation the right of children to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them. Lastly, she wished to know how children were represented before the courts when their interests clashed with those of their parents or guardians.

10. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan) said that the rights of children aged from 15 to 18 were defended by their parents or guardians, although children aged over 16 were entitled to defend their interests before the courts alone.

11. Ms. SARDENBERG asked whether, despite its having been an independent State only since 1991, Azerbaijan's authorities had drawn up a programme to take into account the recommendations of the World Summit for Children, held in New York in 1990. It was her impression that Azerbaijan's population still had a rather outdated view of the child's place within the family and society. However, the people of Azerbaijan appeared to be building a new democracy and the time seemed right to encourage a public debate on the role of the child and to conduct relevant research. The legal prohibition of all forms of discrimination between men and women was to be welcomed, but she wished to know what was the actual situation of women in Azerbaijan.

12. Ms. MBOI said that it was important to define an age for sexual consent. In all societies, people had sexual relations outside marriage, regardless of whether tradition favoured them or not. The relatively large number of children aged under five suffering from sexually transmissible diseases was sufficient evidence that that was also the case in Azerbaijan. Consequently, and in view of the fact that the phenomenon of sexual violence against children was on the increase in many countries, it was important to set relevant limits.

13. Ms. MOKHUANE asked whether there were any procedures to enable the population to participate in drawing up the draft law on adoption. She also asked why restrictions had been imposed, contrary to article 15 of the Convention, on the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

14. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked the Azerbaijani delegation to complete the information it had provided in reply to question 19 on birth registration, in order to clarify the allegation that births of handicapped and refugee children were not registered. She also found the reply to question 20 wanting, because, although specific measures to protect children from physical or sexual violence were described, no mention was made of their actual nature, of the machinery set up to implement them and of how cases of violence were brought to the attention of the judicial authorities.

15. Mr. RABAH said that, he too, would appreciate additional information on how births were registered and on the obstacles preventing the proper registration of births. He noted that there were a large number of refugees in Azerbaijan and asked what requirements were laid down for acquiring Azerbaijani nationality. Lastly, he asked whether the minimum legal age for employment, 16 years, was observed in practice.

16. Mr. KOLOSOV asked what provisions applied to relations between fathers, mothers and children in case of divorce, and whether both parents could keep in touch with their children regardless of who had their custody. He also drew attention to a gap between the age at which compulsory schooling terminated (15) and the minimum age for employment (16). A 15-year-old child, who did not wish to continue his studies but who was not yet entitled to work, would face problems.

17. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, and referring to the answer given to question 17, asked whether the principle of respect for the views of the child, which was set forth in law, was also applied in practice, particularly within the family. She also asked how the principle of the best interests of the child would be reflected in the new Act on the rights of the child, whether it was already applied in practice and whether it was debated in public. Referring to the statement that Azerbaijani society was somewhat traditionalist, she asked whether, like many other countries which had achieved independence, Azerbaijan was opening up to foreign influence and to what extent the behaviour of young people was affected by it.

18. Mr. EFENDIYEV (Azerbaijan) said that even before independence, women had played a major role in Azerbaijan's politics and society. Many of them currently held leading positions.

19. He then replied briefly to the questions that had just been asked: Azerbaijani citizenship was automatically acquired by any child who was raised in Azerbaijan, regardless of his parents' nationality; birth registration was very strictly controlled; access to the foreign media and to the world's literature was facilitated from early childhood, and the teaching of foreign languages, which facilitated such access was becoming widespread, despite the current lack of qualified teachers.

20. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan) added that a parliamentary human rights commission and a social policy commission were responsible for all matters relating to the family, children, sport, health, medicine, the disabled, etc., and that the two commissions occasionally drew up bills jointly. The Azerbaijani authorities were also endeavouring to enlighten public opinion and made available to the public all the modern means of communication and of information, ranging from television - CNN was received in Azerbaijan - to those of computer science, and practised a policy of welcoming foreigners in order to enable Azerbaijan shortly to take its place among the nations of Europe and the world.

21. A number of points had been raised regarding the disabled. As far as failure to register their birth was concerned, he refuted the information and said that the formalities for the registration of births made such a practice impossible. The financial needs of the disabled were met by the health insurance system, which fully covered the health needs of all disabled persons, and by allowances paid to the families of disabled children until they reached the age of 18 years.

22. Regarding freedom of assembly and association, he said that there were youth organizations and that an act providing for the provision of meeting places for young people was being drawn up. Furthermore, under the provisions of the Act on Access to Employment, which had just been adopted, children could sign a contract of employment from the age of 16 and were authorized to do so from the age of 14 with the agreement of their parents or guardian.

23. He recognized that sexual relations outside marriage were in a legal vacuum, but said that legislation under consideration would fill the vacuum and also determine the age for sexual consent. Lastly, although the place of children within the family and society was not the subject of an actual public debate, sociological studies of the issue were under way and a working group of the relevant parliamentary commission had been given the task of sounding out public opinion and determining how to reflect it in legislation.

24. Mr. KARAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that there were 80 youth associations, that 12 organizations dealt with the problems of children and that there were almost 200 sports schools, in addition to clubs and cultural centres to provide for artistic development. It was true that only one survey - UNICEF's survey of street children - had focused on the opinion of children, but that was already a beginning. Azerbaijan was a new country that still had much to do in terms of legislation and practice to implement many of the principles already well established in the West.

25. Mrs. EVAZOVA (Azerbaijan) said that as a result of the Armenian attack on Azerbaijan more than 300,000 Azerbaijani children were living in refugee camps and were short of food and school equipment. Furthermore, in the territories occupied by Armenia schools, social infrastructure, crèches and kindergartens had been destroyed and the Government lacked the means to carry out the indispensable reconstruction.

26. The CHAIRPERSON, referring to question 20 of the list of issues, asked what concrete steps the Government had taken to protect children who were the victims of physical or sexual abuse. She said that she would also like to know whether the Government had adopted legislation to protect children from the ill-effects of what might be called video culture, i.e. films portraying violence or sexual acts, for example by prohibiting the sale or renting of pornographic magazines or cassettes to children under the age of 18 years.

27. Mrs. KARP, referring to the Government's reply to question 31 of the list of issues, asked why it mentioned the receipt of pensions by disabled children aged under 16, rather than under 18. It also seemed that under Azerbaijani legislation a representative of the public authorities was entitled to be present during meetings of private associations. She asked for further information on that provision which, if it existed, was likely to hinder freedom of association.

28. Regarding disabled or refugee children, she asked whether the authorities were doing everything possible to avert the possibility of discrimination against some children through lack of access or restricted access to public services and whether there was a housing programme for such children in Azerbaijan. She also emphasized the vital importance of providing an effective health and educational data-collection programme. She asked whether Azerbaijan possessed statistical resources to identify the number of cases of violations of the rights of the child and thus determine preventive strategies.

29. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked whether it was intended to set the same marriageable age for girls and boys in order to put an end to that form of gender-based discrimination.

30. Ms. SARDENBERG asked for further information in connection with the Government's reply to question 24 of the list of issues concerning the benefits and, in particular, concerning the special leave, to which mothers with two or more children under 14 or a disabled child under 16 years of age were entitled. She also asked whether the Government had drawn up a comprehensive action programme for children as a follow-up measure to the World Summit for Children.

31. Mr. RABAH said that he would like to know what measures the Government had taken to deal with the problem of street children.

32. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan), replying to Ms. Sardenberg, said that the reply to question 24 referred to disabled children aged under 16 because children aged over 16 were entitled to work and were covered by rehabilitation

programmes drawn up in conjunction with UNICEF and the Red Cross. However, even if they were employed, disabled children were entitled to ad hoc benefits or allowances.

33. With regard to marriageable age, he said that the difference between boys and girls could be explained by the fact that in Azerbaijan girls were considered to be physically mature earlier than boys, and he added that with special consent the age could be lowered by one year for both boys and girls.

34. Regarding refugee children, it was true to say that they suffered from discrimination in comparison with other children. However, responsibility for the discrimination did not lie with the Government, but rather with the Armenian aggressors and the international community for its failure to help to solve the problem.

35. Mr. KARAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that it was difficult to put into statistical terms cases of violations of the rights of the child. However, the Government would endeavour to make good that shortcoming and had already made plans to establish, within the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs, machinery to allow more precise data and information to be gathered on young people. The authorities nevertheless knew how many children had been killed or disabled as a result of the war in Nagorny Karabakh. Moreover, regarding discrimination against certain children, he said that a UNICEF programme had been introduced to create jobs for orphans and the disabled in order to integrate them into society.

36. In reply to the question by Mrs. Karp, he said that the law made no provision for a representative of the authorities to be present during the meetings of private associations. The Government planned to take measures to ensure that each community could use its own language. Currently, children living in small villages could study in Russian and Azeri, although in practice, as there were sometimes barely 100 children in such villages, it was difficult to prepare teaching material in their language for them alone. Lastly, the sale or renting to minors of magazines or video cassettes glorifying pornography or violence was prohibited by law.

37. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask any questions they had concerning family environment and alternative care (list of issues, paras. 22-30).

38. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she would like to know, in connection with the reply to question 22, in what circumstances children who were refugees or orphans because of the Armenian aggression were admitted to State institutions. She asked for information on cooperation with UNHCR in that sphere and wished to know what impact the economic crisis had had on access by those children to welfare benefits. She would also like to know the divorce rate in Azerbaijan and would appreciate additional information on the mental health of the children of divorced couples. Was the child's opinion taken into account in determining custody. She also wished to know whether Azerbaijan planned to become a party to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

39. Referring to the Education Act, mentioned in the reply to question 29, she asked what criteria were used to decide whether to place a child in one type of establishment rather than another and whether the child's views were taken into account. She also asked whether a section of the new children's code would deal with the problem of abuse of children within the family.

40. Mrs. KARP asked whether the planned new legislation concerning adoption would make it possible for adoptive children to know who their biological parents were, contrary to the current Act which provided for their name and even their first name to be changed, but made no provision to allow children to see their original birth certificate. She noted that in Azerbaijan many displaced children were cared for by close relatives who brought them up without adopting them or even being officially awarded custody, and asked what measures were taken to protect the rights of those children and of the families who had taken them in. She also asked what the Government's policy towards orphans or children deprived of their family environment was, and in particular what alternative solutions were provided, in view of the shortage of large establishments, and whether there were any plans to make greater use of family placement. In view of the large number of displaced or refugee children separated from their family, she would also like to know whether any institution was responsible for helping them to trace their family and if so, how it operated. Lastly, she asked whether Azerbaijan had any data on violence against women and against children within the family, both of which were linked, and whether there were any guidelines and institutions to deal with the problem.

41. Ms. MBOI said that she doubted the reliability of data, and in particular data relating to adolescent suicides, according to which the suicide rate had fallen among 15-24 year-old males but had almost doubled among young women in the same age group. She also asked what solution or combination of solutions the Government of Azerbaijan intended to favour, in view of the circumstances, to care for adolescents, such as adoption, family placement in Azerbaijan, inter-country adoption or institutional placement.

42. Ms. SARDENBERG noted that there were many female heads of single-parent families in Azerbaijan and asked whether any studies had been carried out into the matter and whether the Government planned to develop a policy to improve their circumstances.

43. Mr. KOLOSOV said he noted from the report that only 1 per cent of the 300,000 child refugees in Azerbaijan were attending school. He asked what the situation of the other refugee children was. In that connection, he suggested that it would be preferable to describe them as displaced children, since many of them had come, not from a foreign country, but from occupied Azerbaijani territory. In the same connection, he would like to know whether in Azerbaijan all displaced persons were registered and issued with a document officially attesting to their status.

44. Noting that the Azerbaijani Parliament had just adopted an amendment to the Marriage and Family Code, extending to foreign citizens the same rights as Azerbaijani citizens enjoyed in respect of adoption and simplifying the procedure by giving responsibility for the final decision to the local authorities, he expressed his concern that, as Azerbaijan was not a party to

the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, it would be impossible for its authorities to monitor the living conditions of children sent abroad for adoption.

45. He asked whether the Government planned to introduce machinery and to draw up plans for gradually improving the circumstances of the most underprivileged sectors of society, in particular by increasing the allowances paid to reduce the rising number of children abandoned at birth by destitute mothers and of street children. Furthermore, regarding living conditions in orphanages and other institutions caring for children, he asked whether, in view of the insufficient resources assigned to them, the Government planned to reallocate certain budgetary funds to remedy the situation and thus meet its commitments under article 4 of the Convention, by guaranteeing decent living conditions for those children who were already deprived of their family.

46. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether Azerbaijan had introduced educational programmes and family counselling services for parents to help them to understand their responsibilities towards their children, and whether it had introduced legislation to compel parents to meet their financial obligations towards their children. She also asked whether Azerbaijan had concluded or planned to conclude bilateral or multilateral agreements to compel an expatriate parent to meet the needs of his child or children left in Azerbaijan.

47. Ms. MOKHUANE said that, according to information she had received, a public boarding establishment had been closed in 1993 and some of its boarders placed in an establishment for patients with psychological disorders. She asked whether the delegation was aware of the case and if any measures had been taken to remedy the situation.

48. Mr. KARAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs had drawn up a draft special assistance programme for families, which was currently being considered by the Parliament, and that the definitive programme would take into account the ideas put forward by the members of the Committee. He confirmed that the word "refugee" used in the report covered internally displaced persons.

49. Mr. EFENDIYEV (Azerbaijan) added that in Azerbaijan there were both displaced persons and refugees in the strict sense of the word, i.e. people who had been driven from a foreign country, in particular Armenia, in 1987 and 1988, and that since 1990 refugees of Turkish origin had also arrived from Central Asia, together with Georgians. As a result there were currently 300,000 foreign refugees and 700,000 forcibly displaced persons in Azerbaijan.

50. Mr. KARAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that many children who had been left parentless by the war were indeed raised in the family of near relatives in different regions of Azerbaijan. There had not yet been any legislation on the practice but the Government planned to provide assistance for families who took in children and brought them up as their own. Moreover, that solution cost the Government less than the huge orphanages inherited from the Soviet period, while enabling children to enjoy a family atmosphere that was more favourable for their psychological development. Regarding the orphanage some of whose inmates had allegedly been transferred to other establishments,

including hospitals, he asked whether the source of the information could contact the Azerbaijani delegation to enable it to ascertain whether it was true.

51. The Government had taken measures to reduce the number of street children, taking into account the views of the children concerned. The action was essentially conducted by ad hoc commissions responsible for "problem" children, which had been set up in all regions of Azerbaijan and which included representatives of NGOs, teachers, social workers and educators.

52. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Azerbaijani delegation would reply to the questions not yet taken up at the Committee's next meeting.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

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GE.97-16875 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 6) (continued)

Initial report of Azerbaijan (continued) (CRC/C/11/Add.8; CRC/C/Q/AZER/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Azerbaijan resumed its place at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Azerbaijan to reply to the questions asked by members of the Committee at the previous meeting.

3. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan), referring to the questions concerning State support for orphans and for refugee and disabled children, said that in 1992 all such children had been freed of the obligation to pay taxes for communal services. The Supreme Commissariat for Refugee Affairs provided resources for refugee children and had also established a social and psychological rehabilitation programme. However, the assistance provided was insufficient, given that children were extremely traumatized by the effects of war.

4. Since the end of 1992, 40 international humanitarian organizations had been operating in Azerbaijan. The Cabinet of Ministers had set up a special structure to coordinate activities with them. Each year United Nations bodies monitored those activities, studied the needs of refugees and furnished material assistance for them.

5. With regard to ill-treatment of children in the family, a special section on the matter would be included in the new Criminal Code that was currently in preparation.

6. In the former Soviet Union, adopted children did not have the right to discover the identity of their natural parents, as it was considered that they would be unduly traumatized. In contrast, under Azerbaijan's proposed new legislation children would have the right to look for their parents.

7. Similarly, in the former Soviet Union, children without parents were usually confined to special institutions accommodating up to 500 orphans at one time. As an independent State, Azerbaijan was currently seeking to reduce the number of children in institutions by placing them in a normal family environment.

8. It was recognized that individual cases of violence against children, and between men and women, did occur. Efforts were made, however, to prevent family conflicts in order to avoid their negative effects on children. The recommendations which members of the Committee had made concerning families in poverty were most useful. A study carried out in 1996 had established that over half the population of Azerbaijan lived below the poverty line. The psychological condition of such families was being monitored. It was the task of the State to create jobs and small businesses with the aim of alleviating poverty.

9. As a result of the war, 20,000 people had been killed in Azerbaijan and many families had been left without a breadwinner. Organizations had been set up to assist single mothers, including one called "Without You". A special NGO committee was also dealing with such problems.

10. Certain instances of mothers leaving their children in hospital had been cited. However, that was not a mass phenomenon and was usually the result of social problems. The phenomenon of adolescent suicide was also rare. Cases, some of which had been reported in the press, were the subject of investigation by the authorities.

11. Mr. GARAEV (Azerbaijan) said that the mechanism set up in Azerbaijan to monitor the implementation of the Convention was a State institution. The country also had a Commission on Minors' Affairs, which was being reorganized for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the Convention. Its members included representatives of State bodies and public organizations who had set themselves the task of helping to resolve children's problems. Regular meetings of the Commission were held at which reports were presented by State authorities and NGOs.

12. In all cities and regions of Azerbaijan there were governmental authorities responsible for children's affairs. The Special Commissions which, in the former Soviet Union, had dealt with the problem of difficult children had recently been restored. The new commissions worked with deprived children and also coordinated action designed to protect children's rights. Opposition parties and NGOs were able to participate in the monitoring of such action at the local and regional levels.

13. Reference had been made to the lack of information and of school textbooks on the subject of children's rights. In that connection he drew attention to the fact that in the past 100 years the alphabet in use in Azerbaijan had changed three times and that schools currently did not possess enough textbooks in the Azeri language with the new script. However, the Ministry of Education was endeavouring to publish sufficient textbooks for children between the ages of 6 and 10 in order to ensure that they were well educated. The State was not yet in a position to publish sufficient teaching materials and appropriate technical assistance from international organizations would therefore be greatly appreciated.

14. Ms. SARDENBERG said that, in reviewing the education system, it was important to take account of the problem of gender stereotypes, whose elimination should be undertaken in implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing.

15. In connection with the problems of institutions for orphans, and for disabled, abandoned and sick children, he emphasized the need to implement article 25 of the Convention which called for periodic review of the placement of children in care. The decisions taken by competent authorities should be reviewed on the basis of article 3 of the Convention, which provided that the child's best interests should always be the primary consideration.

16. She would like some clarification of the meaning of the terms "difficult children", and "gifted children". The latter was a positive term but could give rise to discrimination.

17. In its written replies the Government of Azerbaijan had indicated that environmental problems were tackled by the State authorities, including law-enforcement agencies. More information should be provided on that subject, as such problems had a very serious impact on children's health.

18. Mr. RABAH asked whether sexual abuse and prostitution of children were serious problems in Azerbaijan, whether pollution was affecting children living in cities and whether there were problems with the quality of water supplies.

19. Ms. KARP said that the information provided by the delegation concerning the new mechanism for the coordination and monitoring of action for the protection of children was of great interest. The mechanism should also provide for the maximization of resources, the elimination of duplication and the development of a multidisciplinary strategy.

20. Regarding the possibility of establishing mechanisms for the submission of complaints by children, he said that such mechanisms should be easily accessible and should be established in conjunction with the monitoring and coordination mechanism introduced, but should nevertheless also be able to function independently.

21. Studies on children's issues and on family violence and child abuse were being carried out. It was important that effective use was made of their findings in planning the enforcement of laws designed to combat such practices. Studies of the problem of street children should be undertaken to determine the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse on the one hand and children who left home to live on the streets on the other.

22. A large number of displaced children had been one consequence of the war in which Azerbaijan had been involved. How many children had been affected? How many had been reunited with their families and what had been done to help them?

23. Turning to the family environment, she asked what was the attitude in Azerbaijan towards public awareness campaigns and efforts to teach families about the right of children to participate. Was such a right part of the national culture and, if not, what was done to encourage it, not only in court and administrative decisions but also in everyday family life?

24. Finally, what was the general attitude towards corporal punishment in the home? Had attempts been made to educate families not to employ such forms of punishment? Also, was corporal punishment prohibited in schools and, if so, what other disciplinary measures had been introduced?

25. Ms. MOKHUANE asked what Azerbaijan's policy was with regard to pre-school and early child development. Had specific measures been introduced to assess standards in the centres that had been established?

26. It was important to improve school buildings and to equip schools with the necessary infrastructure such as heating and sanitary facilities. Given the level of destruction of schools and other educational establishments in the war, she was concerned about the quality of basic education. Had the Government introduced minimum curricula requirements?

27. The initial report submitted by Azerbaijan did not contain any information on adolescent health. What was the system of data collection and monitoring? Had programmes for suicide prevention been set up, given the apparent psychological trauma experienced by children, and what was done to promote mental health at the national level?

28. Ms. MBOI, noting the considerable success achieved in combating poliomyelitis, diphtheria and tuberculosis and in the testing of blood for HIV and hepatitis, expressed the hope that the Government and people of Azerbaijan would be able further to improve health and nutrition in what was a very difficult situation.

29. The very high rate of infant and child mortality in Azerbaijan was a matter for concern. The rising mortality rate among the under-fives as a result of measles and sexually transmitted diseases was all the more worrying as those problems were preventable. Furthermore, the tradition of breastfeeding had greatly declined.

30. She noted that the maternal mortality rate had almost doubled in the past two years, and was concerned about access to reproductive-health and family-planning services. Access to modern contraceptives for men and women of reproductive age appeared to be extremely limited. That gave rise to unwanted pregnancies and hence to abortion and associated health risks. Was reliable information on abortion available?

31. With regard to access to reproductive-health and family-planning services, especially for adolescents, reference had been made to training provided for doctors and the general public. However, it was necessary to determine what services were available for adolescent and young married couples. As risks were increasing in most countries, services should not be denied to those who sought them.

32. Concern had been expressed regarding the situation of internally displaced persons. However, a health and nutrition study published in April 1996 had indicated that the situation of internally displaced persons was not a great deal worse than that of people who had not left their home.

33. It was desirable to introduce comprehensive public health strategies, with clear priorities focused on education, preventive measures, maternal and child health, family planning and reproductive health. Those strategies should be complemented by the allocation of resources, community mobilization and technical assistance in order to improve the situation of children in Azerbaijan.

34. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO reminded the delegation of her previous question concerning the divorce rate in Azerbaijan. She also wished to know whether social workers attended to the physical and mental welfare of children whose parents were divorced.

35. Breastfeeding should be encouraged not only to protect the child's health but also to establish an emotional link between the mother and child. Was Azerbaijan participating in the UNICEF programme to promote breastfeeding and, if so, what results had been achieved to date?

36. The written reply to question 33 of the list of issues referred to Ministry of Health treatment and prevention centres designed to reduce the mortality rate from accidents. Had studies been undertaken to identify accident causes and had preventive action been taken in schools?

37. She gathered that the high incidence of congenital deformities, hereditary illness, anaemia and cardiac and renal problems was related in many cases to exposure to industrial chemicals and to pesticides in the cotton industry and other agricultural activities. Was the Government contemplating some form of protection, for example in the form of products designed to offset the effects of toxic gases?

38. Was there an awareness-building programme to prevent the spread of diarrhoeal and infectious diseases and to control iodine deficiency disorders which were endemic in some mountain regions?

39. As indicators of the quality of education, she inquired about the normal class size and the average drop-out ratio. What was the status of teachers in society, inter alia in terms of remuneration? Was the Government responsible for curriculum content in schools where minority languages were taught? Was primary education compulsory and what measures had been taken to ensure that children enjoyed the right to education guaranteed under article 28 of the Convention? Was corporal punishment tolerated in schools?

40. She also asked whether the Ministry of Youth and Sport or any other bodies operated recreational or cultural programmes for young people at the national, regional or municipal levels. To what extent did girls participate in such programmes?

41. Mr. KOLOSOV, noting that most drugs and medical supplies in Azerbaijan were imported and extremely expensive, asked what measures had been taken to ensure that children had access to appropriate medical treatment, particularly where a surgical operation was required.

42. Mrs. KARP asked whether there was a plan of action, an awareness-building programme or pre-marriage counselling to deal with the problem of thalassaemia. Had the health services access to appropriate equipment for testing?

43. What action was taken to ensure that school playgrounds were safe and to alert families to possible sources of accidents in the home?

44. She asked whether the statement in the written reply to question 37 of the list of issues to the effect that international cooperation in dealing with environmental problems was not excluded meant that technical assistance was being requested.

45. Referring to the written replies to questions 31 and 32, she observed that only a small proportion of disabled children were receiving State support. For example, only 30 disabled children had been provided with prosthetic appliances and only 25 with wheelchairs. Was there any strategy to increase the number of children receiving support and to integrate them into society? Were facilities for disabled children available in regular schools? She understood that children with official disability status were entitled to special benefits but that the families of many eligible children and even their doctors were unaware of the existence of such benefits.

46. Mr. RABAH noted from the written reply to question 39 that instruction in schools was provided in at least three languages. How did the resulting multilingual environment affect intercommunal relations among young people? What languages were used in universities and the mass media?

47. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO inquired what government action was being taken to address problems relating to the disposal of toxic waste and petroleum residues. Had the possibility of moving people away from certain polluted areas been considered?

48. Mrs. MOKHUANE asked whether the collapse of a number of youth organizations in Azerbaijan had led to a vacuum in the area of leisure activities for young people. What forms of recreation apart from the visual media were available to them?

49. Mr. EFENDIEV said that Azerbaijani had been identified as the State language in both the present Constitution and its predecessor. Over 80 per cent of the population were ethnic Azeris. However, Russian was used in the Parliament and Russian-speaking deputies could use the services of State interpreters free of charge. A roughly equal number of children's books were published in Azerbaijani and Russian. State publishing houses also produced children's books and school textbooks in other languages such as Lezghin, Talysh and Judaeo-Tati. Newspapers for both adults and children were published in a wide range of languages. Georgian was the language of instruction in areas inhabited by ethnic Georgians. All secondary schools and universities provided instruction facilities in both Azerbaijani and Russian.

50. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan) said that the Committee was perhaps not making sufficient allowance for the gravity of the current situation in Azerbaijan, with 20 per cent of the country under occupation, 1 million refugees and a major economic crisis. Nevertheless all the Committee's recommendations would be borne in mind and implemented wherever possible.

51. Azerbaijan had special schools for gifted children that focused on mathematics, physics and chemistry, and also specialized boarding schools. In addition, there were schools run by foreign communities, for example Turkish schools, European schools and an English-language Israeli school.

52. The refugee problem had an ecological dimension. The biosphere had been changed by the occupiers, who had destroyed forests and polluted water reservoirs. Children, especially in Sumgait where there were major chemical plants, had suffered greatly from air and water pollution. The level of the Caspian Sea had risen by two metres, submerging houses and schools and affecting some 20,000 families.

53. Owing to the extremely difficult economic situation, the authorities had so far been unable to prevent ecologically unsound products from entering the Azerbaijani market.

54. There were certainly instances of child prostitution and there was also a black market in pornography but they were not widespread phenomena. The authorities were nonetheless deeply concerned, also with the phenomenon of street children, and were doing their best to address those problems.

55. Families had been successfully reunited in about 1,000 cases but separation of members of refugee families had not been a mass phenomenon. Further information on that subject would be provided later in writing.

56. Large families with five or six children were common in Azerbaijan and there were strong traditional family bonds. Corporal punishment was prohibited in both families and schools and was a rare occurrence. Each instance of ill-treatment in school was discussed by the teaching staff and legal action could be taken against the culprit.

57. Breastfeeding was the traditional practice in Azerbaijan. Some women had switched to substitute products when they came on the market in the 1970s and 1980s but recent promotional work in the media and elsewhere had reversed that trend.

58. About 500 children suffered from thalassaemia, an inherited disease. Legislation on the use of donor blood had been adopted as one means of protection. Intermarriage between relatives in remote mountain villages, often one of the causes of the disease, was discouraged but not prohibited.

59. About 4,000 schools had been destroyed in the occupied territories. Educational facilities for displaced persons who had moved to other parts of Azerbaijan were not ideal. Classes were overcrowded and there were often no funds for providing the schools with heating or glazing windows. Assistance in that area was being provided by international organizations, particularly the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

60. Recently promulgated health legislation dealt with such problems as child and maternal mortality, family planning, access to drugs and contraceptives and sterilization. There was little awareness of family planning facilities in many rural areas, particularly among people living in tent settlements. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Médecins sans frontières were providing assistance in family planning and prevention of abortion.

61. About 100,000 people had been living in the tent settlements for up to four years. Their hygienic facilities left much to be desired.

62. Legislation for the protection and rehabilitation of disabled persons had recently been adopted and in that context provision had also been made for the prevention of accidents.

63. Children had access to medical treatment free of charge. Owing to the shortage of public funds, however, it was proving difficult to purchase adequate medical supplies, which were extremely expensive in a market economy. Patients might eventually be charged for specialized services in some medical establishments. Where facilities were not available within the country, patients were occasionally sent abroad for treatment.

64. Many illnesses such as tuberculosis were often the consequence of poverty, and strenuous efforts were being made to deal with that problem in Azerbaijan; the market economy would eventually help in overcoming such illnesses. The Government had a programme of support for marriage and the family, and consultancy and advisory services were available to couples before their marriage. There was a need for invalid chairs for children, and consideration was being given to building a factory to produce them; at present they were very expensive to buy. The refugees would soon be returning to their homes, and it was expected that there would then be a sharp increase in the number of children injured by landmines. The Red Cross and Red Crescent had already opened an orthopaedic hospital where children could be fitted with artificial limbs. If a family had an invalid child it received a benefit. A great deal of effort was being put into integrating disabled children into society: they received special treatment on public transport, and were encouraged to engage in sporting activities.

65. Mr. GARAEV (Azerbaijan) said that, since the Beijing Conference in 1995 there had been intensive development of women's organizations in Azerbaijan. There was no discrimination between boys and girls in the country, even at the level of attitudes. Formerly, "difficult" children had been those who had grown up in families where one or both parents were alcohol-dependent or where one of the parents was in prison; now a much wider range of "difficult" children were targeted, most of them children who had grown up without parents as a result of the war.

66. A State department was responsible for monitoring the environment, and other organizations were involved, such as Greenpeace and those representing young people who were concerned about environmental matters.

67. Child prostitution was strictly prohibited by law, and there was little information concerning it. The Government had investigated a newspaper report on the subject but had failed to find any evidence of what had been described as child prostitution. No research on the subject had been carried out, but consideration would be given to commissioning such work in the future.

68. Before Azerbaijani children could enjoy all the rights established in the Convention, as something that should be offered by a normal society, the difficulties caused by the Armenian aggression had first to be overcome, for they were the main cause of the problems suffered by Azerbaijani children.

69. Azerbaijan had all the necessary schools for young children and, when large enterprises which had had their own kindergartens had been forced to close down because of the economic situation, the children had been taken into government kindergartens. Research was being carried out, with UNICEF assistance, on the psychological rehabilitation and psychological health of children affected by the new economic situation and the Armenian aggression. Such research would form the basis for any future action.

70. A conference had recently been held on the state of reproductive health in Azerbaijan, and a special programme on the reproductive health of the family was being implemented by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with international non-governmental organizations operating in the country. Proposals for a family planning programme aimed at young people were being considered by a parliamentary commission.

71. On the question of recreational facilities for children, he said that the country's economic situation imposed constraints in that area, but since the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports a programme had been developed that involved the entire population in sports activities as a form of health measure. The Government, in cooperation with many NGOs and also private companies, was taking action to provide leisure facilities for young people, but there were economic difficulties which especially affected those children who were living in tented camps.

72. Education was compulsory in Azerbaijan up to the eighth grade.

73. The CHAIRPERSON asked the delegation of Azerbaijan to forgive members of the Committee if they seemed to be too idealistic in their expectations; they were guided only by the Convention, however, and by Azerbaijan's ratification of that instrument. There had been a dearth of information in the report, and it was important to seek as much as possible in order that the Committee might fulfil its responsibilities towards the children of Azerbaijan. She invited further questions from members of the Committee.

74. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that, despite the delegation's denial of the existence in Azerbaijan of gender-based discrimination, information available to the Committee indicated that it was to be found there, chiefly in respect of such matters as job opportunities.

75. Rather than stigmatizing children by referring to them as "difficult", it might be better to use the term employed by UNICEF, "children in specially difficult circumstances". There was a close link between a healthy environment and enjoyment of the rights of the child; the environment must be a subject of study in schools, where it could be taught both easily and cheaply. The report referred to there being few cases of sexual exploitation of children, and mentioned legislation in general rather than specific measures. Consideration needed to be given to preventive and other measures involving NGOs, the media and public awareness campaigns, with the collection, if possible, of gender-specific data. Under an international cooperation project, the United Nations Centre for Human Rights had been providing Azerbaijan with technical assistance designed to strengthen the rule of law.

Had there been any follow-up to that project, and what was the Government's view of it? In general, what priorities did the Government have for further international technical assistance?

76. Mr. KOLOSOV said that, given the increase in juvenile delinquency and adolescent crime in Azerbaijan, thought should be given to the establishment there of specially trained juvenile courts. Independent, rather than Government control of corrective labour institutions for adolescents was extremely important, because there had been cases of adolescents' rights being violated in such institutions. People other than the police and officials of the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Education had to be involved and social institutions should be allowed to deal with complaints of violations of rights. At present complaints were addressed to the very persons about whom the complaints were made. Azerbaijan could be the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States to establish an Ombudsman for the rights of the child. He or she should be a person who was completely independent, who reported only to the Parliament and who had the right to take legislative initiatives and to investigate specific cases.

77. Mrs. MBOI said she well understood the economic and other difficulties to which the delegation had referred; she had been dealing with war, poverty, colonialism and economic difficulties as a member of the Indonesian Parliament for more than 30 years. However, children could not be expected to wait: improvements could be made and had to be made. The written reply to question 48 of the list of issues concerning child labour had referred to labour legislation, but the very fact that legal provisions existed meant that the Government acknowledged that child labour existed or that it anticipated that it would become a problem in the future. What monitoring facilities and mechanisms were in place to ensure that child labour was eliminated? In particular, what was being done to stop child labour in the informal sector, where most children were working and where they met the most hazardous conditions? The written reply to question 50 of the list of issues likewise referred to legal provisions on sexual abuse, thereby acknowledging that it existed or anticipating that it might get worse. Given that it was a criminal offence, what was the punishment for perpetrators? Since most of the perpetrators had mental health problems, had any thought been given to providing diagnostic and therapeutic facilities for them? Did the delegation consider that in general Azerbaijan had a good system for monitoring the situation of children?

78. Mrs. KARP said that most of the Committee's questions about the system of juvenile justice had not been answered. From the dearth of information concerning the number of children in institutions, the offences that were committed and the discretion of the courts, it could be assumed that the Azerbaijani juvenile justice system needed comprehensive reform, not only with regard to the establishment of juvenile courts but also in many other respects, such as the establishment of a system of alternative punishments, movement away from the criminal justice system, and development of minimum standards for institutions and mechanisms for monitoring the system. The Convention contained provisions relating to the juvenile justice system, but there were also other international instruments that dealt with the subject. She referred the delegation to the Beijing Rules and other United Nations standards for the administration of juvenile justice, such as the

United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty and the Riyadh Guidelines for the prevention of juvenile crime. Those international instruments provided much useful guidance. The Committee itself had also studied the juvenile justice system, and the report of its discussion of the subject might be of some assistance. There were also other United Nations agencies which had programmes and experts in that area, and Azerbaijan should certainly consider turning to them for technical assistance in establishing a new and effective system of juvenile justice.

79. In connection with the dearth of information concerning sexual abuse in Azerbaijan, both in the family and in prostitution, she urged that studies be undertaken in order to ascertain the real situation. There was, after all, a vicious circle in that the difficulties that hindered children in complaining about their abuse might also create a general impression that the problem did not exist, whereas the real situation might be completely different.

80. Mr. RABAH asked how the juvenile courts were distributed throughout Azerbaijan and whether the system was that of a one-court judge. He asked if there were any statistics indicating the kinds of offences committed by juvenile offenders in Azerbaijan, and whether the sentences passed on them were adapted to their age. The written reply to question 46 of the list of issues stated that pre-trial detention in custody had applied to 59 people, and that the number of children detained for not more than three hours had been 6,323 in 1996 and 1,580 in the first quarter of 1997; three hours seemed a surprisingly short period of detention.

81. Under articles 84 and 90 of Azerbaijan's Code of Criminal Procedure, one preventive measure that could be employed was the placement of a minor in an appropriate children's facility or under the supervision of its parents, guardians or custodians. Who were those guardians and who was responsible for the minor? Where were the places of detention, and were the juveniles detained there together with adults? What relationship was there between the State and non-governmental organizations working with juvenile offenders, and were there any training programmes for the police, lawyers, social workers and judges who were involved in the system of juvenile justice? Was legal aid available automatically or was there a special procedure for obtaining it? Did a sentence appear on a juvenile offender's record for anyone to see?

82. Mr. RADJABOV (Azerbaijan) said that much remained to be done in coordinating and systematizing social assistance programmes and the Committee could perhaps arrange for Azerbaijan to receive relevant technical assistance. Governmental efforts were being made at the local level to coordinate the efforts of international organizations, among them UNICEF, the World Health Organization and Médecins sans frontières. Assistance would also be welcome in the preparation of draft legislation that would appropriately incorporate the terms of the Convention.

83. The National Assembly was working to establish an office of ombudsman in the area of human rights. Although it would perhaps not be practical to create a separate ombudsman for children's rights, the idea of a children's subdivision was worth contemplating. No mechanisms were currently in place to monitor programmes for children in difficult circumstances. With the transition from a planned to a market economy, many families were launching

small businesses, in which children played a role. It would perhaps be useful for the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs, in conjunction with the international organizations, to review that problem.

84. As Azerbaijan progressed toward a market economy, and concurrently, toward both urbanization and integration into the culture of Western Europe, the problem of sexual abuse was sure to worsen. He agreed that efforts should be made to grapple with its social and psychological aspects, and to develop preventive measures. The notion that children were often reluctant to bring to light instances of sexual abuse was an interesting one, and would be borne in mind. In future, efforts should be made to publicize sexual offences against children, as a lesson to others.

85. Juvenile court judges were generally not professional jurists, and were elected by the population as a whole. Punishments for children depended on the gravity of the crime. Children were seldom held in preventive detention, but any such procedure was conducted in accordance with Azerbaijan legislation. All police stations had staff specially trained to deal with minors, generally persons with teaching or social work experience who were often women. He agreed that efforts should be made to bring such procedures into accord with the terms of the Convention. Under the former Soviet regime, the arrest of an adolescent had severe consequences for his future prospects; that was not the case under the present system. He did not know whether a child's criminal history formed part of a permanent record.

86. There was one corrective labour facility in Azerbaijan, designed to provide education, cultural opportunities, and employment to 20 to 25 juvenile offenders. The latter were engaged in producing useful goods, mostly chairs and tables. Their output was sold, and the limited proceeds went partly to the establishment and partly to the inmates.

87. Approximately 130 children under the age of 18 were held in juvenile institutions in Azerbaijan, most for theft. The majority were refugees, many of them orphans, who had stolen out of need. If the Committee so wished, relevant statistics could be provided. Most children who had committed offences were not, however, held in detention facilities. Although they were required to report to the appropriate institutions, they could be regularly employed.

88. All juvenile justice faciities were currently overseen by the Ministry of Justice. The special schools and correctional institutions had special teacher-training centres; all personnel who taught in those facilities were regular teachers working on a second shift. Furthermore, medical professionals monitored the health of all institutionalized children.

89. Mrs. SARDENBERG thanked the delegation of Azerbaijan for its spirit of openness, as well as for its evident commitment to the cause of children. She hoped that the delegation would take vigorous action to encourage implementation of the Committee's various recommendations, in particular, the establishment of a children's code, the development of a comprehensive implementation strategy in the economic, social and political areas, the creation of a coordinated system for decentralized cooperation, and greater involvement of NGOs. Under the terms of article 3, paragraph 3, and of

article 25 of the Convention, the Government should improve the supervision of children's institutions, and should ensure that the treatment of children placed in such facilities was subject to periodic review. Relevant national legislation should be enacted and measures should be adopted to ensure its implementation. In that connection, Azerbaijan might consider referring to the NGO network recently organized under the auspices of the Department of Public Information (DPI), to deal with the matter of juvenile justice. Programmes should be developed for the social and psychological recovery and reintegration of disabled children and children in conflict situations, with emphasis on family and community participation. She hoped that Azerbaijan would continue to benefit from international cooperation and give wide dissemination to the Convention.

90. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said she was heartened by Azerbaijan's commitment to children, and in particular by the country's plans to adopt a children's code. Various reforms could already be suggested in light of the current discussion. They included establishment of the age of sexual consent; revision of the age of marital consent so as to make no distinction between girls and boys; and reconsideration of the minimum working age, taking into consideration the age requirement for compulsory education. The Government should introduce measures to protect children from mental and physical violence, develop a national children's policy overseen by a single coordinating body, strengthen the educational system and improve the quality of teaching. Finally, it should accord especial attention to the notion of the best interests of the child as well as to that of the child's right to be heard.

91. Ms. MOKHUANE said that Azerbaijan faced problems in the areas of legislative reform and education in the rights of the child. It suffered, furthermore, from a lack of coordination among governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as among ministries, and would require assistance in the area of institutional capacity-building. Both police officers and members of the National Assembly involved in the drafting of legislation should be familiarized with the principles of the Convention. Furthermore, Azerbaijan should seek lasting solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons, and should provide, where possible, housing and other support for them. Those drafting national legislation should consult all levels of Azerbaijani society, and should draw on the expertise of international bodies. In revising the Marriage and Family Code, the proceedings of the Fourth World Conference on Women should be consulted, and the views of women's organizations should be sought.

92. The Government should endeavour to strengthen the deteriorating health-care infrastructure, and should establish a mental health-care system, with especial emphasis on children, women, and families. Lastly, it should launch peace education and conflict management programmes.

93. Mrs. KARP associated herself with the views that had been expressed by other members of the Committee. She assured Azerbaijan that the Committee was not unaware of the crisis from which that country was suffering. In situations of conflict, the rights and needs of children were often forgotten. If the Azerbaijan Government intended to allow refugee children to live in tents until the war ended, it was incumbent on the Committee to urge it to reconsider its decision. If not resolved in a timely manner, certain

incipient social problems, such as the health of the environment or the existence of street children, would later entail a far greater social cost. As a new nation, Azerbaijan had the unusual opportunity to create, from the outset, viable national structures that would promote favourable conditions for children, and concomitantly, for society as a whole.

94. Mr. RABAH said that Azerbaijan must attend to social and educational concerns despite the difficulties it faced. The establishment of viable democratic structures would protect the future of that country, and with it, the future of its children; in the interval, NGOs must necessarily play a vital role in the implementation of the Convention.

95. Mr. KOLOSOV noted that members of the Committee had made little reference to the armed conflict in Azerbaijan, perhaps because the delegation had mentioned it so often. However, if even a single child participated in a military operation there, that was a matter of grave concern to the Committee and the international community. The Convention strictly proscribed the involvement of children in such conflicts.

96. He emphasized that the Azerbaijan Government should endeavour to assess the future impact of all its policy decisions on the lives of children.

97. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Azerbaijan to present its concluding remarks.

98. Mr. EFENDIEV (Azerbaijan) said that he had been impressed by the sincere interest of the members of the Committee in the young citizens of Azerbaijan. He assured them that their recommendations, as well as the interesting new ideas they had put forward, would be taken into consideration by his Government in the future.

99. Azerbaijan was seeking to progress from a planned to a market economy, while at same the time struggling to maintain its newly achieved independence. Twenty per cent of its territory was occupied by Armenia; over a million displaced persons were living in 10 camps within Azerbaijan. He agreed that the lives of its children were of crucial importance to the future of the country, and that the Convention was the fundamental instrument on the basis of which their lives could be protected. It was clear that Azerbaijan should cooperate closely with the Committee. His delegation had answered the questions of members insofar as possible; further replies would be forwarded to the Committee later in writing.

100. The CHAIRPERSON said that she associated herself with the views expressed by the members of the Committee. Although the Committee was sensitive to the considerable difficulties facing Azerbaijan, its primary concern was the protection of the rights of the children of that country. All actions taken on behalf of children should take into consideration the four central precepts of the Convention: the best interests of the child; the child's right to participate; the child's right to survival and development;

and non-discrimination. She urged Azerbaijan to ensure the participation of children in its society. An important fact to bear in mind was that children were their own best teachers. Consideration should perhaps be given to the development of a peer-counselling system.

101. Furthermore, considering the provisions of article 37 of the Convention, she exhorted Azerbaijan to abolish capital punishment for children under the age of 18.

102. Finally, the Government of Azerbaijan should give publicity to its dialogue with the Committee during the session, so as to acquaint the population with its rights and thereby guarantee the rights of children.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.